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Thirst for Annihilation

Particles decay, molecules disintegrate, cells die, organisms perish, species become extinct, planets are destroyed and stars burn-out, galaxies explode...until the unfathomable thirst of the entire universe collapses into darkness and ruin. Death, glorious and harsh,

sprawls vast beyond all suns, sheltered by the sharp flickerlip of flame and silence, cold mother of all gods, hers is the deep surrender. If we are to resent nothing—not even nothing—it is necessary that all resistance to death cease. We are made sick by our avidity to survive, and in our sickness is the thread that leads back and nowhere, because we belong to the end of the universe. The convulsion of dying stars is our syphilitic inheritance. (146)

In [Mark Fisher's](#) talk at the [Accelerationism conference last year](#) he says that Nick Land “took seriously to the level of psychosis and auto-induced schizophrenia – and that's really true – the Spinozist-Nietzaschean-Marxist injunction that a theory cannot be serious if it remains at the level of representation”. *Thirst for Annihilation: George Bataille and Virulent Nihilism* is not then a work of academic study but a practise, or an attempt at one, a working with Bataille in an exacerbation aimed at collapse of the strictures of the academy, religion, philosophy and ultimately humanity.

Land's work with Bataille is something like an experimental physics of expenditure. Bataille's solar economy ungrounds thought by recognising all power as given antecedently by a greater power. This economy is not one of increasing returns or teleological aims however, but a meaningless waste of energy, consistent and purposeless expenditure. Living creatures and all societies are marginal detours in a return to nothing, or death.

Death is perhaps the central concept of the book and I find it difficult to fully articulate all of the ways in which Land deploys it. For one thing at least, death is not the phenomenological horizon of anything's being, nor is it simply the entropic slide to disorganisation. Death is the negative force at the heart of Land's ontology, the aggressive exchange of power to the sum of zero.

Among the motors of Land's book is his septic hatred for all hierarchy, all territorialism. Land's sworn enemy is God, the emblem of all conservative authoritarian accumulation. Land argues quite interestingly for atheism understood in a positive sense; it indexes not a reaction against-God, but a productive real without God. What sometimes undermines this argument, and occasionally tried my patience, is Land's obsessive return to the subject of theism, seemingly incapable of getting more than a few paragraphs without hurling some new insult. This insistent hatred doesn't only weaken arguments about atheism however, but points to a larger problem within the book as a whole.

After God, Land's most despised enemy is Kant, and the sections dealing with his legacy are among the most interesting of the book. Land's position as a founding influence among speculative realism is clear from many passages and his diagnosis of the withered and introverted state of post-Kantian philosophy exhilarating to behold, accomplished as it is with the nauseating gusto of Land's writing.

Land's remedy to Kant's division of the world according to epistemology is an ontology of primary production from which thought as secondary production arises. Base materialism as put forward by Bataille considers all matter as libidinally powered and productive. Base matter produces thought and instantiates a second order of production with a tendency to transcendentalise itself, to take credit for all action in the world and demote base matter to inert resistance. A libidinal materialism however recognises the power of base matter and is able to make contact with in certain intensifying actions: sex, violence, visceral and bodily connections unmediated by thought.

Land's Bataillean subversion of the Kantian schema owes much to Deleuze and Nietzsche with intensive powers providing the motor for non-teleological becoming. The problem that I see in Land's

project owes to an imbalance or one-sidedness of concept. What does death destroy, what does action intensify, if not the conservative forces of instituted order? But what institutes order?

It seems to me that Land is obsessed with God because he needs Him; without a territorialising force there would be nothing to deterritorialise. Of organising creativity Land has almost nothing to say, except for a brief section on negentropy where diversion from expenditure is ruled "not impossible". Chance deviation is basis of all instituted structure yet this seems exceptionally poorly matched to the all consuming power of death, or zero, as the eternal motor of destructive exchange. A political or theological dualism between massive ordered hierarchy and atomised co-operative anarchy is ontologised with the greater share of power going to all deterritorialising forces, leaving accumulative forces under-explained except for the dictatorial myth of God and society.

Despite it's flaws and it's occasionally self-indulgent prose Land's book is an exceptional work, and exhilarating ride through an axis of philosophy rarely explored with such bilious fury. At it's highlights, especially those sections where Land undermines Kant with dark sarcasm and a carefully chosen quote from one of the critiques, it's philosophy at it's most exciting. Like Nietzscheanism it's difficult to imagine anyone living like this, and [Land it seems wasn't able to keep up the relentless pace](#), but as inspiration for all deviant intellectuals it is unparalleled.

Chris

1 comment:



peter 18/12/12 22:58

came across something written by Nick Land the other day: http://www.ccru.net/swarm1/1_melt.htm and it just reminds me of something written by a character out of Nathan Barley; or even written by Chris Morris in one of his "Jam" moments.

Like a lot of Deleuze inspired philosophy, its very creative and some of it is exhilarating, but an awful lot of is absolute nonsense

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